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ABSTRACT

A closeup look is provided of a trend in the field of educational policy in the 1980's: the establishment of university-based centers that have a mission of providing state policymakers with nonpartisan, reliable data on education policy options. The development and characteristics of education policy centers are examined. The first section briefly describes the context out of which education policy centers have emerged to link universities and policymakers. The next section provides descriptive data on 16 university-based policy centers that are currently operational in 14 states and highlights commonalities and differences across centers as well as pitfalls that have been encountered. The final two sections address initial efforts to establish a network among these policy centers and the prognosis for such centers to serve the state policymaking community. Appended is a list of university-based education policy centers and a 47-item bibliography. (SI)

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TRENDS & ISSUES

A series of papers highlighting recent developments in research and practice in educational management

The Emergence of University-Based Education Policy Centers

Martha M. McCarthy and Gayle C. Hall

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Foreword

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management is pleased to publish this second paper in the Trends and Issues Series. In the following pages, Martha M. McCarthy and Gayle C. Hall provide a closeup look at one of the most remarkable trends in the field of educational policy in the 1980s: the establishment of university-based centers that have a mission of providing state policymakers with nonpartisan, reliable data on education policy options. McCarthy and Hall describe the contextual factors—political and educational—that led to the emergence of these centers; their characteristics, such as funding sources, activities, and research agendas; their efforts to collaborate via a network; and the prospects of these centers effectively linking the research and policymaking communities.

At the time this volume went to press, sixteen education policy centers were established in fourteen states. We hope the information contained in these pages will be useful to researchers in additional states who might wish to establish policy centers.

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Introduction

Given the plethora of recent state education reform initiatives, opportunities for improving schools have never been greater. The reform efforts have raised expectations for effective results, so the potential for failure has also been intensified. Thus, state policymakers have an increasing need for accurate, relevant information on education issues. One strategy to meet this need has been the creation of university-based education policy centers that are designed to provide nonpartisan, credible data on policy options and the impact of policy decisions.

This paper examines the development and characteristics of these education policy centers. The first section briefly describes the context out of which education policy centers have emerged to link universities and policymakers. The next section provides descriptive data on sixteen university-based policy centers that are currently operational in fourteen states and highlights commonalities and differences across centers as well as pitfalls that have been encountered. The final two sections address initial efforts to establish a network among these policy centers and the prognosis for such centers to serve the state policymaking community.

The authors wish to thank Mark Buechler, research associate at Indiana University, who provided valuable assistance in checking references and reviewing numerous drafts of this paper.

Context: The Need for State Policy Analysis

The need to expand both the quality and quantity of state-level policy analysis has been heightened by the changing federal role in education, particularly the devolution of federal support for school reform initiatives. In contrast to the steady growth in federal financial assistance for targeted education programs during the latter 1960s and 1970s, the federal share of education spending declined from a high of almost 10 percent in 1980 to 6.2 percent in 1988 (Grant and Snyder 1986, National Education Association 1987, Verstegen and Clark 1988).

The Reagan Administration championed not only a reduction in federal spending for education but also the elimination of cumbersome federal regulations for education programs (Clark, Astuto, and Rooney 1983; Stedman and Jordan 1986). The administration's position was that the profusion of federal programs and accompanying regulations creates—rather than alleviates—problems by placing unnecessary burdens on state and local officials who are in a better position than the federal government to address education concerns (Clark, Astuto, and Rooney 1983). One justification offered for the diminution in federal education spending and policy initiation has been the enhanced capacity of state governments to exert leadership—for example, longer legislative sessions, more legislative staff, improved revenue-collection systems, and expanded gubernatorial powers (Doyle and Hartle 1985).

Although the federal government has reduced support for education reform activities, the Reagan Administration has used moral persuasion or the "bully pulpit" to influence state education agendas. The U.S. Department of Education has urged states to focus on individual and school competition, higher performance standards for teachers and students, parental choice, and character education as strategies to improve schooling (Clark and Astuto 1988, Guthrie and Koppich 1988, Jung and Kirst 1986).

A series of nationally distributed reports, grounded in the assumption that economic stability and international competitiveness depend on an upgraded education system, has also reinforced the clarion call for state educational reform. Distribution of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 by the U.S. Department of Education (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983) is often cited as heralding the first wave of state reform efforts, even though a number of state education initiatives were underway prior to this report. By the close of 1984, several other reports had called for higher standards for students, an overhaul of teacher preparation, and improved working conditions for teachers (Boyer 1983, Education Commission of the States [ECS] 1983b, Goodlad 1984, Twentieth Century Fund 1983). Kirst (1988c) recently observed that these reports were based on the assumption that fundamental changes were not needed in public schools; the existing delivery system "could be intensified to meet the economic challenges" (p. 320).

While the first wave of reform reports focused on the need "to make schools as good as they *used* to be" (Mehlinger 1988, p. 4), a second wave of reports, beginning in 1986, has urged basic changes in the delivery of educational services. The second wave has been characterized by calls for school restructuring, school-based leadership, and greater professionalism and empowerment for teachers (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy 1986, Holmes Group 1986, National Governors' Association 1986).

States Respond to Calls for Reform

Governors, state boards of education, and legislators responded quickly to the initial calls for state education leadership with a barrage of school reform initiatives (Bridgman 1985). Several hundred commissions to study education problems and suggest strategies for improvement were created at the state level by the close of 1984 (ECS 1983a, Stedman and Jordan 1986). From 1983 to 1987 virtually all states initiated some education reform measures, usually focused on student standards (for example, higher graduation requirements, statewide testing programs) and/or programs for teachers (for example, testing programs, beginning teacher intern-

ships). Regarding teacher policies alone, between 1983 and 1986 over 700 pieces of legislation were introduced across states (Darling-Hammond and Berry 1988). Moreover, all states increased their education budgets; adjusting for inflation, expenditures increased by 25 percent from 1983 to 1986 (Odden 1987).

One of the most striking features of recent state education policy has been the extent to which governors and legislators have shaped its substantive focus (McDonnell 1988). Many governors have added education specialists to their staffs; the number of legislative aides with education expertise has increased; and education has been a key issue in several political campaigns. With the release of *Time for Results* in 1986, the National Governors' Association (NGA) launched a five-year project that exhibits an unprecedented commitment to educational reform among state governors. The NGA is issuing annual progress reports until 1991 to sustain and focus state attention on educational improvement. The first two reports, *Results in Education: 1987* and *Results in Education: 1988*, have already been released.

Not only has there been a shift in the key actors involved in school reform, but also there has been a fundamental change in the substance of the reform efforts. The reforms of the 1960s and early 1970s emphasized school access and targeted programs for traditionally underserved groups of students (notably, the disadvantaged, handicapped, English-deficient). The excellence movement of the 1980s, in contrast, has addressed the basic core of the educational enterprise—what is taught, who teaches, and how performance is assessed (Fuhrman, Clune, and Elmore 1988; Guthrie and Koppich 1988).

While state policymakers responded swiftly to the initial wave of reform reports by raising standards (Hawley 1988), recent calls for parental choice, school restructuring, teacher empowerment, and other fundamental changes in the delivery of educational services have been more troublesome. Petrie (1987) has observed that this second wave of reform has shown more sophistication regarding what is needed to obtain lasting educational change, but legislative responses have still retained "a major dependency on assessment, testing, and evaluation" (p. 176).

Challenges to Policymakers

Several elements of the second-wave petitions for school reform present particular challenges to state policymakers and underscore the need for additional state policy analysis. Policymakers are less certain regarding the state's role in initiating and monitoring reforms that address issues such as teacher empowerment and parental choice than they were in responding to earlier calls for higher performance standards. The "prescription and intensification" strategy that has been so popular in the 1980s thus far does not seem appropriate to address fundamental restructuring of the educational enterprise (Hawley1988, Kirst 1988c, Olson 1988).

There is an inherent tension between the "centralizing" strategies employed by legislatures in the early 1980s and recent calls for local school autonomy and school-site management of resources and the curriculum (Hawley 1988). Many of the widely adopted first-wave reforms, such as statewide testing and more stringent graduation and teacher certification requirements, have been mandated and monitored at the state level and have increased standardization across local school districts (Doyle and Finn 1984, Doyle and Hartle 1985). Some policy analysts have cautioned that such centralization might stifle flexibility and innovation at the local level and reduce the likelihood that reforms will be effective and tailored to unique local needs (Boyer 1988, Doyle and Hartle 1985, Wise 1988). Despite evidence that the state mandates have stimulated some local districts to go beyond the state's minimum requirements (Fuhrman, Clune, and Elmore 1988), policymakers are still faced with the challenge of designing strategies to ensure accountability for standardized results while nurturing local autonomy.

Another challenge for policymakers is to develop policies that ensure greater coordination among various public agencies in serving the needs of children. While programs for at-risk students have spread rapidly across states, most of these efforts have not involved comprehensive policies that address children's health, welfare, and education needs in a coordinated fashion. Given the indisputable evidence that environmental factors outside the classroom have a significant effect on children, a broader policy perspective regarding programs to address the needs of youth is needed (Kirst 1988b).

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges is for policymakers to ensure that decisions are based on the best information available about changing demographic conditions and the advantages/disadvantages of various policy options. It has been politically expedient for states to implement extensive school reform packages. Several initiatives—such as teacher testing programs and higher graduation requirements—have spread across states at a phenomenal rate (McDonnell 1988). But state governments traditionally have not been known for the strength of their analytic capacity. Some commentators have asserted that many of the reform measures have been implemented without a sufficient knowledge base about what actually works in schools (Boyd 1987, Loup and Ellett 1988, McDonnell 1988). There has been a paucity of information on implementation strategies and fiscal consequences of various reform initiatives (Cohen 1985). Policymakers have relied to a great extent on data provided by politically motivated special interest groups (Cohen 1985), and such information is often perceived as tainted by bias. In addition, states have often failed to provide adequate support for the evaluation of education reform initiatives; thus, the impact of policy decisions has not been adequately documented.

Can Universities Help?

Because the rapid implementation of reform initiatives has outpaced states' analytic capacity, one might expect policymakers to turn to universities for assistance. Universities historically have built their reputations on the quality of their research. There is a certain credibility to university research and evaluation activities because the investigators are expected to be objective and aloof from partisan politics and the pressures of special interest groups. Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980) have noted that university research can generate awareness of needs and problems, provide information about effective strategies, bring emerging issues into focus, and justify current policies (see also Shavelson 1988).

Nevertheless, state policymakers typically have not fully tapped the research capabilities of universities. Traditional academic research, with its theoretical emphasis, has often been viewed as out of touch with the real world of action-oriented policy initiatives. Policymakers feel that "researchers—even when they have findings of broad public interest—often do not present those findings clearly and concisely in a language that the public can understand" (Kirst 1988a, p. 1). State legislators traditionally have been more receptive to information from their own staffs, selected lobbyists, or the state department of education, rather than from university professors (Cohen 1985, Fuhrman and McDonnell 1985).

Numerous state, regional, and national associations and other actors outside academe have increased their involvement in state policy analysis.* Universities, too, have tried to respond to policymakers' need for nonpartisan, credible data on educationpolicy issues. An increasing number of universities have established education policy centers in an attempt to bridge the current gap between researchers and policymakers. In fact, the number of such centers has more than doubled in the last two years from seven centers in 1986 to sixteen centers in 1988. These centers are intended to serve as brokers, linking the state policy community with university researchers, a role that in turn can nurture more visibility for universities in state education reform. These centers do not propose to write policies or lobby for particular positions, but rather to inform the policymaking process by identifying the merits of various policy options and assessing the impact of policy decisions. Olson (1987) has noted that neutral, nonpartisan policy centers can provide "reflective analysis" on key education issues.

While it is too soon to assess whether such policy centers will live up to their promise, the concept is becoming more popular. Thus, it seems appropriate to examine the status of university-based policy centers that have been established to date.

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* For example, the federally funded regional education laboratories have a commitment to state policy analysis and to tracking the impact of reforms in their regions. Also, several national organizations, such as the Education Commission of the States, the National Governors' Association, and the National Conference of State Legislators, have expanded their state data-gathering activities and have joined forces on various projects to assess the status of reform efforts across states. The Center for Policy Research in Education is tracking the implementation of education policies in a number of states, and the Council of Chief State School Officers has established a center to develop a national system of standardized education indicators. Private foundations and corporations have also become actively involved in supporting policy analysis focused on the improvement of schooling. In addition, individual states have taken steps to improve data gathering and analytic capacity, for example, by strengthening research and policy analysis units in state education departments.

Description of University-Based Education Policy Centers

Composite data reported in this section were gathered from education policy centers that share the following characteristics:

1. They are affiliated with schools or colleges of education.
2. They focus on state-level policy analysis.
3. They conduct research on a range of education topics, as opposed to a single issue such as testing.

Directors of ten centers were interviewed in 1987 (Hall and McCarthy), and a survey of sixteen directors was conducted the following year. Two of the six new centers identified in 1988 will not become fully operational until 1989. Table 1 depicts the number of university-based centers that have been established by year and by state. A list of the sixteen centers is included in the Appendix.

Table 1
University-Based Education Policy Centers, 1988

Number of Centers	*Year Established*	*State*
1	1980	TN
1 (2)*	1983	CA
2 (4)	1985	TX, NJ
3 (7)	1986	CO, IN, OH
4 (11)	1987	FL, SC, UT, CO
5 (16)	1988	VA, IL (2), KY, WA

* Cumulative numbers are in parentheses.

All but two of the sixteen centers are located at research universities, as defined by the Carnegie Foundation's (1987) classification of institutions of higher education. A majority of the centers are affiliated with departments of educational leadership, but most view their activities as spanning education departments as well as units outside schools or colleges of education. One center has sites at several universities.

The remainder of this section provides a summary of the interview and survey data pertaining to the impetus for establishing the centers, their mission statements, strategies for establishing a niche in the university and state policy community, staffing patterns and funding sources, activities, research agendas, dissemination strategies, and responses to center activities. Although the centers share many commonalities, they also exhibit differences, reflecting their unique state and university contexts. Thus, comparisons across centers must be drawn with caution, as political climates differ significantly across states.

Impetus for Establishing the Centers

Nearly all center directors indicated that the impetus for establishing their centers came in part from the increasing need to provide state policymakers with research-based information on educational issues of current concern. Six directors specifically noted that recognition of education as a priority in the state and/or the shifting impetus for school reform from the federal government to the state level played key roles in the establishment of their centers. Four directors indicated that a need to bridge the gap between researchers and policymakers, practitioners, and consumers played a part in establishing their centers. Acknowledging that universities traditionally have contributed little to the policymaking process, two directors stated that policy centers were seen as a new initiative that could enhance their institution's service to the state. One director noted that the center provided the school with a new direction.

The specific impetus to establish the university-based education policy centers came from a variety of individuals, including deans of colleges or schools of education (7), tenured faculty members who currently serve as center directors (6), other faculty (5), university presidents (3), and members of boards of trustees (2). One director noted that the impetus for the center came from a private foundation after major state policy reforms were implemented.

Center Missions

Because of their common goal to serve as providers or brokers of information, the sixteen centers have very similar mission statements. Their primary mission is to provide an independent source of nonpartisan, research-based information and/or technical assistance to state education policymakers. All centers distribute written reports, and four centers strive to stimulate dialogue about education concerns through public forums or forums held specifically for policymakers. The missions of three centers include tracking the implementation and impact of state education reform initiatives.

Most centers have adopted a nonadvocacy role in disseminating information to policymakers; they provide the facts and arguments on both sides of issues. However, three centers take, or intend to take, a position on issues where the research clearly indicates that one policy alternative is better than other options being considered or implemented.

When asked if they had any advice for those wishing to initiate university-based policy centers, several directors noted that it is important to have a clear mission statement that is congruent with university and state needs. Tailoring activities to the state's unique context is imperative; learning from centers in other states is useful, but emulating them is not.

Establishing a Niche in the University and State Policy Community

Establishing a center is no easy task. Several directors mentioned that the state policymaking process has become more complex, a greater number of actors are vying for legislative attention, and lobbying efforts are more sophisticated. Centers must be aware of and responsive to such changes in the state's political environment. Moreover, directors noted that there must be an unconditional commitment from faculty who will be directly responsible for center operations. A center's success also hinges upon the degree of support received from administrators in the school or college and the university in which it is housed. Of course, the center must have the capacity (staff, resources) to complete projects in a timely manner.

All directors have taken, or are taking, steps to establish their centers in their respective universities. These steps include

- soliciting faculty involvement in center activities and supporting faculty research interests
- appointing faculty members and other university representatives to center advisory boards
- providing support for graduate students
- pursuing a research agenda that is closely aligned with the school/university mission
- utilizing an interdisciplinary approach in selected research efforts
- informing university a[illegible]rators and faculty about center activities

The centers are using additional strategies to establish themselves as credible sources of information in the state policy community. The most commonly used strategies entail

- establishing contact and personal relationships with policymakers
- conducting research for and providing technical assistance to a variety of state agencies
- offering forums, round-table discussions, and seminars to facilitate the exchange of information among the university, government, and business communities
- disseminating reliable, nonpartisan information on educational concerns to policymakers
- appointing state and local policy leaders to serve on advisory boards
- hiring policy analysts who have credibility with state policy leaders
- participating on various state education committees
- making presentations to selected government agencies and professional associations

Staffing Patterns and Funding Sources

For the most part, policy centers do not have large staffs. Only one center has a full-time director. Of the fifteen centers with part-time directors, two centers have four codirectors, one center has two codirectors, and the remainder have single directors. Three centers that have part-time directors also have full-time associate directors and one of these centers also has two full-time project managers. Twelve

centers have three or fewer full- or part-time staff members (director, associate director, clerical staff), and only four centers have a staff of six or more.

Whether centers are large or small, most rely heavily on affiliated faculty (some of whom may change by project) and part-time graduate assistants. Eight centers receive assistance from two to six affiliated faculty members, and three centers have eight to eleven faculty affiliates. Six centers have no graduate assistants, seven employ two to four graduate assistants, and three centers have eleven to sixteen student assistants. In addition to affiliated faculty and graduate assistants, ten centers have either part or full-time clerical staff members.

Operational funds for centers vary from "shoestring" budgets to several hundred thousand dollars over specified periods (for example, two to five years). Only one center has an annual operational budget of more than $100,000. Most directors noted that it is essential to secure initial funding for a three- to five-year period and to have sufficient support so that at least one full-time staff member can be hired to oversee daily activities.

All but one center receive some type of university support, ranging from less than 2 percent to 50 percent of operational expenses. University contributions take the form of reduced teaching loads for center directors or codirectors, office space, partial salaries for selected center staff (director, associate director, secretary, graduate assistants, and so forth), and partial support for operations, such as telephone and supplies. One center is fully funded as a line item in the university's budget, and one center can obtain university support to cover expenses if needed.

Uncertainty about continued funding is a common concern among center directors, as is the amount of time devoted to contract work. Although two centers have major foundation support and one is supported by funds from an endowment, all centers seek grants and contracts to support or expand center services. Seven centers devote over 50 percent of their efforts to contract work, and seven spend between 10 percent and 25 percent of their time on outside contracts. Two of the new centers anticipate devoting time to contract work, but are unsure at this point how much time will be spent on these efforts.

Although contract work provides an important source of revenue for many centers, several directors noted that centers need a stable source of funds that is not tied to contract work. There is a trade-off between time spent on contract work (with funding agencies determining what topics are pursued) and time needed to accomplish desired research agendas. A number of directors indicated that calls for proposals are carefully screened and are submitted only for projects that are consistent with the centers' missions. One center has a policy that governmental contracts cannot exceed two-thirds of the center's annual budget.

Center Activities

Most centers focus their efforts on producing policy papers and reports on key educational issues of current concern. These publications and products range from short fliers on targeted issues to lengthy research reports. Many of these publications focus on state-specific issues; however, a number of them include information on national trends or comparative data from surrounding states. The twelve centers that have been in operation ten or more months collectively disseminated more than eighty policy papers and reports during the past year.* Most centers have distributed at least three reports during the past year, and three centers have completed nine, ten, and sixteen reports, respectively. One center has completed a paper series for a regional laboratory; another has edited a special series on educational policy for a journal; and two centers have distributed newsletters.

All but two centers indicated that they are currently working on new projects and reports. As noted earlier, many of these new activities entail contract work for a variety of state agencies and foundations. Additionally, four centers intend to initiate an occasional paper series; two are collecting state data on the status of education; two are gathering information on policies affecting children in their states; five will be distributing newsletters; one is compiling a directory of persons/agencies having expertise on selected social and education issues; and eleven are collaborating on a project to assess state administrator policies.

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* Topics include class size, teacher assessment, student health issues, teacher retirement, teacher testing, education of minorities, literacy, adult and community education, high school students' attitudes toward teaching, technology in education, incentive pay programs for teachers, school finance, effective schools, at-risk youth, teacher empowerment, remedial and compensatory programs, and the condition of education in the state.

In most centers, products are submitted to an intensive review prior to dissemination. Seven of the twelve centers that have completed policy papers and reports primarily rely on an internal review by center staff, with occasional use of experts in the field to review selected papers/reports. Six centers systematically use both internal and external reviewers. One center pays outside reviewers (typically education office or legislative staff members) $50 for each policy paper reviewed.

In addition to producing and disseminating policy papers and reports, nearly all centers provide (or intend to provide) other services such as workshops, round-table discussions, seminars, or forums; technical assistance to state policymakers; and information searches for a variety of agencies and individuals. Some new services to be offered by one or more centers include coordinating a policy fellowship program for an educational institute, operating an education excellence network, sponsoring state conferences on policy issues, and providing training for doctoral students in policy analysis. Although several centers plan to hold policy forums, one center has discontinued this practice due to confusion of forum participants about a "neutral" group presenting opinion pieces on educational topics.

Establishing Research Agendas

Center activities and research agendas are ultimately established by center directors and staff, but they are influenced by a number of factors. Research agendas are modified as state and national education priorities change. Most centers review national developments; three centers conduct research on national as well as state issues; and thirteen centers focus, or intend to focus, specifically on state and/or regional education concerns.

Research agendas are also influenced by center advisory boards, whose members are usually selected from the university and state policy communities, businesses, and/or federal education agencies. One center has an internal advisory board (university faculty); five centers have external advisory boards (legislators, state education agency representatives, education association executives, governor's staff, and business leaders); and two have both internal and external advisory boards. Four of the eight centers that do not yet have advisory boards indicated that they intend to establish such groups.

The centers' capabilities in terms of human and fiscal resources also influence their research agendas. For example, staff size may place limitations on the number of topics a center can pursue at any given time, especially when trying to meet deadlines imposed by legislative committee meetings and sessions. Research agendas also may be altered by faculty interests and the availability of faculty with expertise in a specific area to conduct policy analyses and assist with projects. Two of the most often-noted constraints placed on research agendas were (1) availability of funds to initiate new projects, and (2) time limitations in balancing center and university responsibilities and/or meeting legislative session timelines. One director emphasized that centers must have the capacity to produce papers quickly because specific topics may be of interest to policymakers only for a short time.

Several directors mentioned that university-based centers must take precautions to maintain their status as independent brokers of information. Institutions of higher education naturally have vested interests in legislative outcomes, and many devote substantial resources to lobbying efforts. Policy centers that are housed in universities may have to combat suspicions that they are pushing their own institution's agenda.

Other pitfalls were noted that can threaten the development of research agendas or the success of center activities. The problems listed below were mentioned by at least one director:

- difficulty in maintaining neutrality between competing interests and personalities
- pressure to seek contract work that threatens the center's central mission
- lack of continuity in center leadership
- unsatisfactory outcomes when commissioning work or collaborating on projects with other agencies
- debate over ownership of data
- other units or agencies feeling threatened or doubting the center's nonpartisan intentions
- lack of commitment from the school and/or university

Only one director did not identify any pitfalls encountered in operation, and one director indicated that it was too early to tell.

Dissemination Strategies

The majority of centers distribute (or intend to distribute) policy papers to individuals in key state policymaking positions, including governors and governors' aides, legislators and legislative staff, senior officers in departments of education, members of finance commissions, and leaders of education associations. In addition to these constituents, three centers disseminate information to individuals in federal agencies and regional education associations; three send papers to state business leaders; five share information with school superintendents and other local education leaders; two disseminate information to university administrators and faculty; and three distribute, or intend to distribute, their research findings to the general public.

Reports generated by contract work are often treated differently. Six center directors noted that dissemination of this information is often limited to the contracting agencies and specific individuals and groups, depending on the nature of the project.

Most centers use direct mailings to disseminate policy papers and reports. Additionally, five centers use workshops, presentations, and seminars; staff from two centers currently hand deliver policy papers, and two other centers plan to use personal delivery; one center holds round-table discussions; one center utilizes the media to disseminate information on major reports; and one center distributes information through state professional education associations and public agencies, such as Parent-Teacher Associations and the League of Women Voters. Four centers are currently in the process of planning their dissemination strategies. Most center directors noted the importance of regular contact with their primary constituencies.

Impact and Response to Center Activities

To date, most centers rely on informal feedback to assess the impact of their activities, and few centers plan to establish formal evaluation systems. In addition to relying on informal feedback, two centers solicit direct comments about center activities from policymakers and legislative staff members. Four directors also use indicators such as frequency of requests for information, services, and research. One director noted that acceptance of the center as a nonpartisan source of information by former skeptics has provided evidence that the center is having a positive impact. Six directors noted that the best indicators of center impact are whether products influence legislative decisions, are quoted in legislative sessions, or change the beliefs and behaviors of consumers.

Although the responses from the state policy community to center activities seem to be positive (seven center directors noted that use of center services and products has increased over the last year), many directors perceive their centers as having limited impact on state policymaking at this time. Only two directors felt that there was already evidence of significant center influence at the state level. Most directors noted that it was simply too early to tell, but several indicated that the impact of the centers should increase as they become more involved in producing research on emerging educational concerns.

Policy Center Network

When universities contemplate establishing education policy centers, they usually contact centers already in operation for guidance. As a result of this informal networking, several center directors in 1987 began to explore the feasibility of a more formal network that might facilitate collaboration among these newly established centers. Eleven center directors were invited to an initial organizational meeting in October 1987, and three subsequent meetings were held in 1988.

Directors or codirectors of eight to twelve centers and several representatives from universities interested in starting policy centers have attended each of the network meetings held to date. In addition, staff members from several of the federally funded regional laboratories, the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL), the Education Commission of the States (ECS), the Center for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL); and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management have attended one or more of these meetings. The university-based policy centers view linkages with the broader education policy community as essential.

Three major thrusts have evolved for this network: (1) to provide a support system for new university-based education policy centers; (2) to engage in collaborative activities involving inter- and intra-state policy analysis; and (3) to devise strategies to bridge the cultures of governmental policy analysts and university policy analysts.

Support System

The network has provided assistance to centers being conceptualized at several universities. It is anticipated that the network will continue to host informal sessions at national meetings of selected professional organizations such as the American Educational Research Association. These sessions will provide an opportunity for those interested in starting centers to interact with directors of established centers.

Collaborative Activities

The center directors have agreed on several collaborative objectives to enhance inter- and intra-state analytic capacity. The network will strive to

- develop a shared capacity to scan salient educational policy issues within and among states
- refine the production and dissemination of research that has an impact on educational policy decisions
- share reports and research produced by policy analysts located in universities, government, interest groups, think tanks, and business/industry
- ascertain and share "state of the art" policy analysis approaches and skills
- ascertain and share ways to educate and train prospective educational policy analysts ("Improving State" 1988)

The centers have already collaborated by sharing their own reports and identifying national databases that might be helpful in conducting state policy analysis. In addition, considerable discussion at the network meetings has focused on developing a common format to analyze the condition of education or the condition of children in each state so that comparable data can be collected and analyzed across states.

Bridging Strategies

Each of the network meetings has focused in part on strategies to bridge the cultures between governmental analysts and university policy centers. Representatives from ECS and NCSL have been active in these discussions. Also, the network has recently launched a collaborative project to analyze policies affecting the selection and work of school administrators within and across the participating states, and a major component is the use of state teams—policy center staff paired with governmental analysts—to jointly plan and implement this project. It is anticipated that this project will enhance the credibility of university-based policy centers among governmental analysts and will be instructive to center personnel in their efforts to translate research into language that is meaningful to policymakers and

practitioners.

All center directors have been enthusiastic about the network and the benefits that might accrue from collaboration among university-based policy centers. In addition to enhancing the legitimacy of the individual centers, the network provides a vehicle to link the centers with national organizations, agencies, foundations, and corporations involved in or providing support for state policy analysis. It also facilitates joint research efforts that capitalize on each center's strengths. Moreover, the centers can learn from one another's expertise and experiences—transporting good ideas and translating others' mistakes into lessons learned. Also, the network meetings provide a forum for the discussion of emerging policy issues across states.

Prognosis for Policy Centers to Serve a Linking Role

Most university-based policy centers are too new for their impact on the development of state education policies to be assessed. However, one center, PACE (Policy Analysis for California Education), has received national publicity for its influence on the policymaking process in California and its success in linking policymakers and researchers (Olson 1987). Notwithstanding the publicity received by PACE, there has been little systematic evaluation of the impact of these education policy centers; only a few researchers have conducted preliminary investigations of perceptions of such centers among state policymakers.

In 1988, Hetrick and Van Horn offered several observations about the emerging education policy centers based on an analysis of interviews with ten center directors and a sample of policymakers in fifteen states. They noted diversity across states in the expectations for and in the operation of the centers, reflecting different political climates across states. Finding evidence of a general need for and receptivity toward the emerging centers, Hetrick and Van Horn concluded that "if relationships between centers and the state education establishment are carefully cultivated, policymakers will turn to the academy with their needs and concerns" (p.109). Their basic conclusion was that policy centers have great potential as a source of credible information.

The same year, Loup and Ellett (1988) reported results of a national survey regarding perceptions toward policy centers of 109 key individuals in policy-making positions, for instance, chief state school officers, chairs of education committees, state governors, and state school board officers. According to Loup and Ellett, the respondents perceived the most important function of policy centers to be monitoring the impact of state policies. Although only 20 percent of the respondents indicated that they were located in a state with a university-based policy center, a considerable number of the policymakers indicated that such centers are providing, or potentially could provide, useful information in policy formation and monitoring. However, given that most centers are quite new and have been established in a small number of states to date, Loup and Ellett concluded that the centers have not yet significantly influenced the policy formation process.

Hurdles to Overcome

To serve as linking agents between universities and state governments, policy centers must overcome several hurdles. Sufficient and stable sources of funds must be ensured for such centers to fulfill their promise. Most centers are dependent on some university support, but only one is fully funded by its host university. Several centers rely on foundation support for basic operational expenses, which allows them to maintain independence in setting research agendas; however, such support is usually provided only on a short-term basis. If a policy center must rely primarily on contract work to support staff and center operations, there is the danger of becoming a "job shop" and losing autonomy in conducting policy analyses.

Another challenge is to establish the credibility of policy research within institutions of higher education. Those who make tenure and promotion decisions often have not given as much weight to state policy analysis as to traditional research. In addition, professors have often been hesitant to devote substantial time to building trust relationships with policymakers, because such "service" activities are not recognized in the university reward system. University administrators need to be convinced that policy research and relationships with policymakers can forge a new leadership role for the university influencing state education agendas. Not only do institutional norms need to be altered to recognize the legitimacy of policy research and related service to policymakers, but also university researchers need to be encouraged to focus on topics of concern to the state policy community.

Moreover, policy centers must establish their credibility with key actors in the policymaking process because, as noted previously, policymakers usually seek information from those they trust (Cohen 1985). Policymakers turn most frequently to in-state

sources, often their own staffs (Cohen 1985, Nelson and Kirst 1981). Policy center directors need to be linked to issue networks—groups of policymakers, experts, and intermediaries who focus on a specific issue like school finance—and need to develop personal relationships with key policymakers (Kirst 1988a, Fuhrman and McDonnell 1985, McDonnell 1988). Thus, those associated with centers need to devote substantial energy to nurturing such trust relationships, especially with those who function as gatekeepers in the flow of information to legislators.

Making Policy Research Useful

For policy centers to play a viable linking role, attention must also be given to translating research findings into language and formats that are meaningful to policymakers. Shavelson (1988) has noted that potential research contributions often are underutilized because of the mismatch between the scientific mind frames of researchers and the action-oriented mind frames of policymakers and practitioners. He has urged researchers to give greater attention to understanding action mind frames through "transactions with policymakers and practitioners" (p. 11). Personal delivery of reports with oral communication of key points is optimal, but not always feasible, so centers must often distribute written materials by mail. A challenge to policy centers is to convert academic research studies into concise and jargon-free formats (Hetrick and Van Horn 1988, Kirst 1988a).

The challenge is more complex than merely translating traditional research into different language; the focus of research studies needs to change. While appropriate formats are necessary, they are not sufficient to ensure use of policy research. "The sufficient condition is *what* is provided—reliable information that covers not just educational effects but also political and administrative feasibility, and information that anticipates issues policymakers are likely to face in the near future" (McDonnell 1988, p. 96). To be useful the research needs to provide direction either for immediate action or for consideration of alternative approaches to problems that may challenge the status quo (Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980). Research on policy options in relation to educational outcomes may have little relevance for policymakers unless it also provides information on consequences of the options for various constituencies (McDonnell 1988).

Conclusion

The "dizzying number" of initiatives to improve schools (Doyle and Hartle 1985, p. 1) has underscored the need to apply education research in the policy development process and to assess the impact of policy implementation. McDonnell (1988) has observed that "the incentives for information use in the current state policy environment . . . present an unparalleled opportunity for the application of education research to policy" (p. 93). The priority currently given to education on state political agendas coupled with technological advances in gathering and accessing data make it a propitious time for universities to establish education policy centers.

Such centers do not offer a panacea to meet all state analytic needs, but they can assist in brokering research, disseminating nonpartisan information on education issues, and tracking the effects of reform measures. Clearly the concept has caught on, as universities in over one-third of the states have established or plan to establish education policy centers. However, the jury is still out regarding whether these university-based policy centers will receive adequate support to meet the challenge of bridging the university and policymaking cultures.

Appendix: University-Based Education Policy Centers

California

PACE (Policy Analysis for California Education)
School of Education
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720
(415) 642-722

Colorado

Center for Educational Policy Research
University of Colorado at Denver
School of Education
1200 Larimer St.
Denver, CO 80204
(303) 556-4857

Laboratory for Policy Studies
University of Colorado
Boulder, CO 80309
(303) 492-8863

Florida

Center for Policy Studies in Education
Florida State University
Stone Building, Room 312
College of Education
Tallahassee, FL 32306
(904) 644-6885

Illinois

Office for Education Policy and Leadership
College of Education
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
1310 South Sixth St.
Champaign, IL 61820
(217) 333-2155

Social Policy Information Institute
Northwestern University
School of Education and Social Policy
2003 Sheridan Road
Evanston, IL 60208
(312) 491-4979

Indiana

Consortium on Educational Policy Studies
Indiana University
School of Education, Suite 326
Bloomington, IN 47405
(812) 855-7445, 855-1240

Kentucky

PACKE (Policy Analysis Center for Kentucky Education)
College of Education
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY 40506-2626
(606) 257-3178, 257-2626

New Jersey

Public Education Institute
Rutgers University
Graduate School of Education
New Brunswick, NJ 08903
(201) 745-5849

Ohio

PROBE (Policy Research for Ohio Based Education)
The Ohio State University
Department of Educational Policy and Leadership
301 Ramseyer Hall
29 W. Woodruff Ave.
Columbus, OH 43210
(614) 292-7909

South Carolina

Educational Policy Center
University of South Carolina
Wardlaw College Building
Columbia, SC 29208
(803) 777-7715, 777-3802

Tennessee

Center for Education Research
Vanderbilt University
1208 18th Ave. S.
Nashville, TN 37212
(615) 322-8540

Texas

Center for Policy Studies and Research in Elementary and Secondary Education
East Texas State University
East Texas Station
Commerce, TX 75428
(214) 886-5138

Utah

FOCUS (Formulating Options to Consider for Utah Schools)
University of Utah
339 Milton Bennion Hall
Salt Lake City, UT 84112
(801) 581-3373

Virginia

Virginia Education Policy Analysis Center
University of Virginia
Curry School of Education
405 Emmet St.
Charlottesville, VA 22903
(804) 924-0808

Washington

The Institute for the Study of Educational Policy
College of Education (DQ-12)
University of Washington
Seattle, WA 98195
(206) 543-6230

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